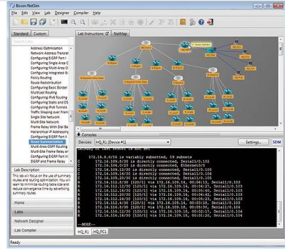By Dr. Liz Hardy
February 25, 2018

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ELEARNING BEST PRACTICES

8 Ways To Simplify Your Online Teaching Approach

One of the biggest challenges of online teaching is the feeling of being overwhelmed. Your students feel it. And so do many online teachers! But when you simplify your systems and processes, you reduce student confusion, increase overall clarity, and make your online teaching more effective.
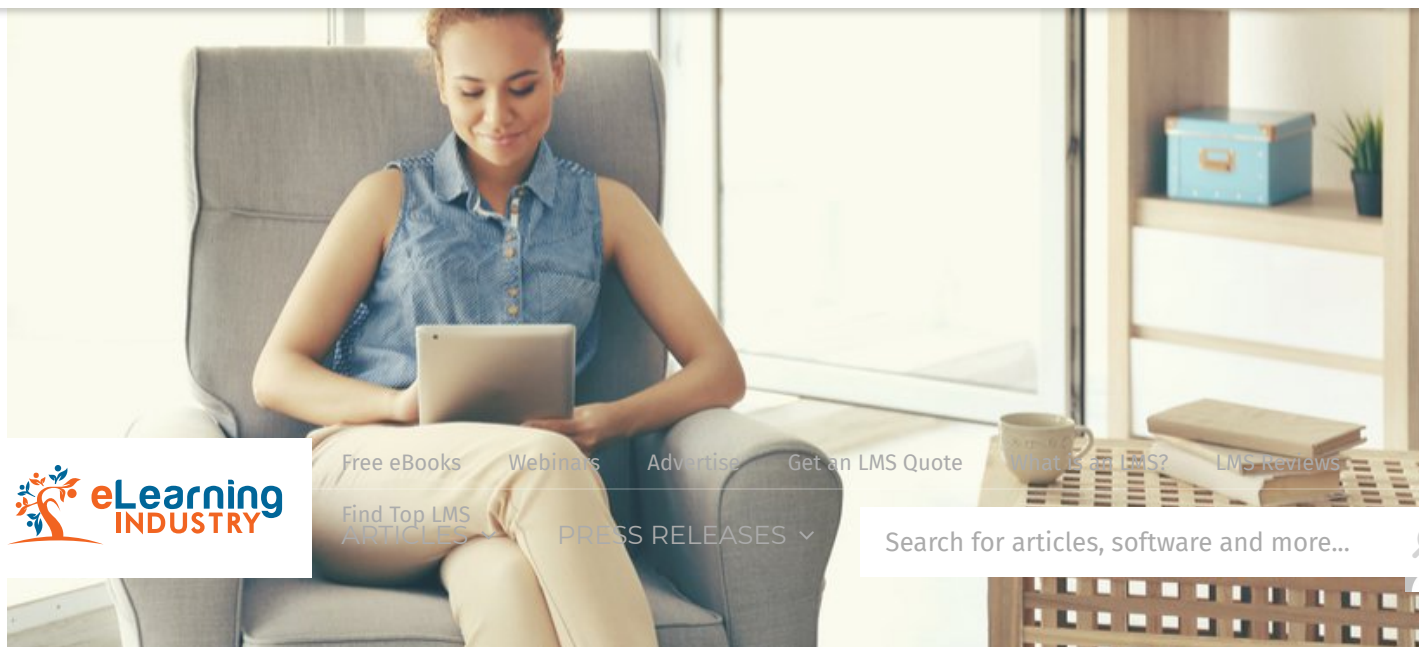
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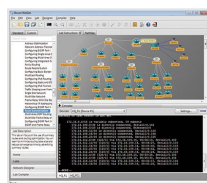
How To Simplify Your Online Teaching Approach

Most online students start out feeling overwhelmed – perhaps even in week one of your course. Usually, they're juggling work, family, and a range of other commitments. As they already feel time-poor and harassed, they often see online learning as complicated and frustrating. And of course, overwhelmed online students are at high risk of dropping out of your class. But it's challenge to offer the personal support they may need. After all, online teachers are often overwhelmed too!

One of the easiest ways to counter this situation is to use an approach that's well within your grasp: greater simplicity.

When you simplify your systems and processes, you silence all that clamoring mental noise coming from you, and your students. There's no need to rush around answering a whole lot

1. Navigation In Your Learning Management System

Take a step back, and look at your LMS through a new student's eyes. There's a lot of information there. Is it clear where everything is? Is there an obvious starting point for someone who's never seen this screen before? Invest 15 minutes in objectively checking that tabs are self-explanatory, and important information is easily accessible.

2. Clarity Of Language

Online teaching mostly involves communicating without visual cues. And when your students are panicking and busy, they're not listening as fully as they should be either. That makes for a communication process filled with potential obstacles. So make sure your communication is as clear and unambiguous as possible. Some ways of doing this include: eliminating jargon, using shorter sentences, and adopting a warm tone.

3. Providing Instructions On How To Get Started And Make Progress

It's easy to assume that students will find their feet quickly, and move independently and confidently through your online course. And, sure, some students will. But many more will need guidance and direction. Make sure instructions for key processes are available – from where to find due dates, to how to upload assignments, and when graded work will be returned.

Most of your students won't know how these processes work. You need to tell them directly.

4. Explaining A Concept Using Numbered Points

Students will often reach out for clarification of the course material, or assessment requirements. When this happens, it means they're either a little out of their depth, or they're over thinking things. A simple explanation of key concepts can clarify both kinds of problems. Try using numbered steps to do this. This helps to "walk" a student through the process or idea so it unfolds logically, rather than being an overwhelming mess of information.

5. Adding More White Space To Your Emails And Web Pages

They're probably logging into the LMS after work, when they're already tired, and there are a million other calls on their time. So make it easier for them to engage with the study guide. Break up your blocks of text with more white space. Help them to scan the screen for the information they need.

6. Using Visual Elements

An infographic, graph, or chart can help to make complex ideas more accessible. You don't have to turn your carefully written course into a child's picture book, of course. But graphics can really help to solidify some of your key concepts, and speed up understanding. You also resonate with a wider range of learning styles by adding this element.

7. Setting Up A FAQ Page On Your LMS

Your students likely use FAQ pages all the time when they're online. They're natural one-stop-shops for getting answers to common questions. So by setting up a FAQ page in your courses, you're using a familiar convention. You make it simple and easy for your students to find the answers they need. In the process, they become more confident independent learners. And they simplify your work day by sending you fewer emails.

8. Pre-Loading Assignment Reminders In Your LMS

At the beginning of a semester, map out the due dates of all the assignments. As well as entering them into the Calendar function in the LMS, try this quick and easy way of making life simpler for you, and your students. Set up a reminder message in your Announcements for each of the assignments. Choose a date of, say, a week before the assignment is due for the message to go live. In 5-10 minutes, you've just set up a simple system for prompting students to submit work on time, and keep making progress with your course.

Simplifying your approach does more than introduce an element of Zen into your working day. It also reduces student confusion, increases overall clarity, and makes your online teaching more effective.

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By Patrick Walther
March 9, 2018

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Learning Record Blockchain

Blockchain technology is neary used in every application area. But how can it improve digital learning? This application scenario should give an idea how this technology could support learning by combining the technology with a Learning Record Store (LRS).

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The Experience Api And The Learning Record Blockchain

In my first article about [Usage Of Blockchain Technology In eLearning](#) I gave a brief abstract about blockchain and one possible application scenario. This article takes a more detailed look at another application scenario, which is the combination of the [blockchain](#) technology and the Experience Api.

What Is The Experience Api?

The Experience Api (xAPI) is an outcome of project Tin Can, of SCORM standard, which was developed since 2010 by ADL (). The main focus of the xAPI is to capture data about a person's activities with instructional content or performance context information.

Examples of a person's activities which can be tracked by xAPI are:

- Reading an article
- Taking a test
- Watching a video
- Chatting with the course instructor

The big advantage in comparison with SCORM is that learning can be tracked outside of the web browser, and group-based learning activities can be tracked. Moreover, it can track experiences in serious games, software simulations, informal and offline learning. One of the biggest advantages is also that you don't an LMS to use content which is compatible with the xAPI.

xAPI provides the data in human and machine readable "activity streams" and provides sub-API which you can use to access and store all information about state and content.

How Could Blockchain Technology Support The xAPI?

doesn't have features like user management, classroom management, test features, etc. but it has all you need to store the captures data and to use it for analytics.

This LRS is normally stored on one server and just contains the data of the activities of the applications which have a xAPI which is connected to this special Learning Record Store. This Learning Record Store could also be created by using blockchain technology. To avoid confusion, I call this one Learning Record Blockchain (LRB).

By using blockchain technology every single activity of a person or group would be stored in one block. This block contains a cryptographic hash of the previous block, the active data, and a timestamp.

Benefits Of A Learning Record Blockchain

The collected data wouldn't be stored on one server. It would be stored on all the different nodes which are part of the network so that every node has a copy of the blockchain. This makes the data secure by design as at least 51% percent of the nodes need to be hacked so that the manipulated data is recognized as the "correct" data.

LRB should then be implemented public as it has the advantage that you don't need any access control and so other applications can be added any time. In this case, learning activities from all applications which are connected to the LRB are stored there.

LRB could store all formal learning activities, e.g. taking a test at university, and also all informal activities of a learner, e.g. reading an article and attending online lessons, which is then validated by the nodes. Right now, every "informal learning activity" is not stored anywhere and if so it is normally not validated.

Data of the LRB could be used to give the learner recommendations for further development. Here prospective content from all the applications which are connected to the LRB could directly be recommended to the learner and he could access it directly without wasting time searching for this content. Beside just recommending content you could also recommend study programmes or job positions if there's enough data available. Of course, here it would help if there was one central taxonomy which is used to tag the content.

changer. It would reward anyone who goes that extra mile by learning at home. At the moment this data is not tracked nor validated. With LRB these activities would be captured and stored. This could lead to job recommendations from recruiters or support the learner in further training.

Of course, a lot more research needs to be done to set up the correct technology and to find partners who are willing to support this idea. But maybe this can be a first step in the right direction.

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